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ELSIE: A CHRISTMAS STORY

FROM THE NORWEGIAN OF

ALEXANDER L. KJELLAND

BY

MILES MENANDER DAWSON

CHICAGO
CHARLES H KERR & COMPANY
1894

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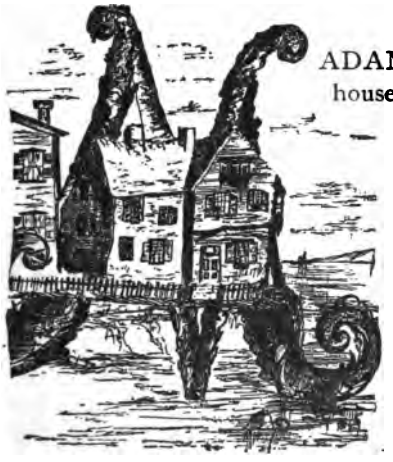
I.



ADAM SPECKBOM owned a house which was called "Noah's Ark." Down in the bright comfortable rooms on the side toward the sun, she lived herself; above lived Miss Falbe with her brother; and up in the garret—there were only two stories—in attic rooms, under the stairs and back of the chimney-pots lived a number of unclean animals which went under the common title, "the gang."

Madam Speckbom was not only a wise woman; she was literally a klog-kone or quack as well; for she was a doctor or, as the regular doctor called her, a quack.

But that did not trouble Madam greatly; she had her good, sure practice, and her skill brought her money and professional triumphs as well.

That part of the community which called Madam Speck-

bom was, of course, not the finest, but beyond comparison the most numerous. It might be that she had five or six patients lying under treatment in little nooks and closets of which there was an incredible number in the old house; and especially of an evening after working-hours, her time was all taken up with making her calls or receiving patients of all kinds.

And then when some one came among them, who had been under the treatment of the regular practitioner—district-physician Bentzen—then there was a sparkle in Madam Speckbom's little brown eyes, and she tossed the three gray curls which hung from a comb over each ear, while she said: "When you come from so learned a gentleman, surely you can't be helped by a toothless old woman."

Then there was a course of maneuvering necessary before she sympathized with the patient; but once she had taken him under treatment, she showed a very especial concern for this one whom the regular doctor "had given up."

And among the town's people—even up among the higher classes—there were spread numberless accounts of Madam's wonderful cures; and one had only to mention her name before Dr. Bentzen, and the old gentleman would jump up, swear and curse—grow fiery red about the head, seize his hat and make off.

The fact was, that when Dr. Bentzen came to common people, he never condescended to give any explanation—he despised their ignorance too deeply for that. He only said:

"You are to do this or that, and there is the medicine."

But now, when the medicine did not help at once—and that can happen with the best of medicine—then the people grew tired of the high-priced druggist, and the harsh doctor who only turned on the floor, gave an order, and went away.

And then Madam Speckbom would come.

She would sit down and explain methodically what it was that ailed the patient—perhaps it might be some kind of fever, for example, "earth-fever," or "water-fever," or say, "body-fever," or "a drop of blood which had stuck fast," or some such thing.

You see, that was something one could understand; and when they got medicine from the Madam, it was something that both smelled and tasted strong, so they could see that it was no "stuff and nonsense."

And if it did not do good every time, everybody understood one thing; that even Madam Speckbom did not have dominion over life and death; yet what could be done, was done, and that was always better than to be torn to pieces by the doctor's suspicious learning, as so many had been. And besides, Madam was much—very much cheaper.

To aid her in her practice, she had a young girl, called Loppen. Madam had brought her home with her, after she had cured her of a bad disease of the eyes.

Loppen had no parents; her name was Elsie.

A surname I do not think she ever had. For she was in fact a daughter of one of the town's finest gentlemen—whose name could not stand on the church records in that capacity.

In a Foundling's Home, Loppen grew up after her mother—a servant girl—was dead. And there it was, too, that she had received her nickname [which means "a flea"].

It came from a dark brown cloak which she had received at a Christmas distribution. It was at first so long and big that when the child hopped about in it, she looked so much like a flea that some one was at last witty enough to give her the name.

And this cloak was of such indestructible material that it followed her through her childhood—first as a cloak, then as a jacket, next as a belt, and at last as a hat with a rose-red band.

She was yet in this hat, with a rose-red band, when she took the disease of the eyes. Bentzen, as the physician of the institution, trifled with her a good half year until she lay like a little beast in a dark corner, and screamed whenever they turned her to the light.

But then Miss Falbe secretly placed her under Madam Speckbom's treatment, and, be it as it may, the child recovered.

Dr. Bentzen was exultant; at last it was his fortune to win the battle with that stiffnecked inflammation.

Then Madam Speckbom could be still no longer, and there was a great scandal. Miss Falbe had to step out of the institution's directorate where she had perhaps been secretly disliked already; Dr. Bentzen was in a rage, and little Elsie, herself, had to suffer on account of her new bright eyes.

But Madam Speckbom took the child home with her then —partly because she was well-to-do and good-hearted, partly because Elsie's bright eyes were a testimony for her of her skill as an oculist; and finally, she used the child to tease Dr. Bentzen with.

He could never go by the Ark—and his road lay by it many times a day—but Madam Speckbom would seize the child, set her up in the window, and thump her on the neck, so she would bow to the doctor. And when she could get him to look in with his malicious grin, Madam Speckbom would shake her six curls in triumph and give Loppen a piece of candy.

As she grew up, Elsie became a fine, slender girl—blonde and a little pale, but still healthy.

She was sprightly and nimble, and had a way of her own of keeping herself and everything about her neat and orderly. But when Madam Speckbom began to try to have her wash, scour, sew, and "be of use," Loppen showed herself utterly incapable. She "felt bad" here and there, and all Madam's good counsel and bitter scoldings were without result.

Madam Speckbom was, as I have said, a wise woman too. She very well understood that disease which came exactly on scrubbing days, and always disappeared, as if by magic Sunday morning. But when she saw that the ailment in this case came up in an incurable form, she confined herself to shaking her curls and mumbling something about "that accursed, aristocratic blood."

But the sick were fond of Loppen, although indeed she was not a faithful or sacrificing nurse. But if she only went through the room or thrust her head in at the door, it was as if their pains and weariness were lightened; and Madam Speckbom fully appreciated what a share of her cures she owed to Loppen's merry laughter.

For it was laughter unlike all other laughter that was ever heard in Noah's Ark. It could steal up the stairs and down into the cellar, through the keyhole to the sick, and right into men's hearts, so that some became very tender and

others had to laugh with her. But every one of them would give whatever you will, to hear Loppen laugh.

And she laughed free at everything and nothing. She had red lips and white sound teeth; but her eyes shone over all—they were Madam Speckbom's pride, for the learned doctor had quite "given them up."

Madam Speckbom's Ark was not so well built as Noah's; It was—to speak plainly—an old tumble-down of a house, which yet stood, because it was built together with a newer and stronger one. But, since like all old folks, it could not bear to accept the support of youth, it continually threw itself more to one side, to protest against the union; and so it came to hang menacingly out over the steep bank, which led down on the east to the harbor and wharves.

It was a corner-building, painted white toward the street, and red on the rear side. All sorts of curves, crooked lines, wry doors, outbuildings and additions seemed to have sent representatives to this Ark; and, as it stood there, in all its impossibility, it was just as great a puzzle for modern architecture as Noah's.

But it must have been strong, notwithstanding; or else "the gang" would certainly have tumbled down into the cellar long ago—such a life as they often led there. It was a a great nuisance to the Falbes, especially at night, when

there was trouble up in "the gang." In the daytime, sister and brother both were out. She had a girl's school in the finer part of town and he was, at any rate, not at the Ark.

They belonged to an old, official family; but there had been something wrong about their father. Rumor said that he had hung or shot himself, on account of an embezzlement; but it was several years ago, and in quite another part of the country; so no one knew anything certain about it.

Sure it is that the children became half-foreign in the town and lived alone and frugally. Miss Falbe's lady-school was in high repute; although she herself was by no means a favorite. She was too imperious and odd for that.

Miss Falbe may have been thirty-five years old; her brother was two or three years younger. She was a blonde, with a big, humped nose and earnest eyes. But at certain times she could smile so friendly that people were quite astonished when they saw it the first time.

Christian Falbe resembled his sister; but he was a handsome man. The big, family nose became him better.

Already, by his thirtieth year, a rosy cloud had gathered about that same nose; for Christian Falbe drank a great deal.

If he had lived in a large city, he would probably have become a quite moderate saloon visitor. But in a little town, where one cannot visit cafes, one steals in at the back door and then learns to drink.

Naturally, all the town knew this about Falbe; but his sister imagined that she kept it hidden from everybody. For that was her constant thought and endless struggle from morning to evening, and oftentimes from evening to morning. She had given up reforming him; she was tired of all his good promises and luckless trials. Now it only remained to support him in some way and so to hide it. They knew their father's fate; but with her, the family pride had collected itself into energy; with him, on the contrary, in futile discontent and bitterness.

He was bright and of good parts; when he had his better periods, he gave private instructions in languages. But then drink would overcome him again, and he would disappear for whole weeks at a time and turn back to the Ark in the most miserable condition.

The sister earned enough for them both. She put money in his purse when he was asleep; she smiled on him when he came home drunk in the evening; she prepared food —the best food she could get, for him. He ate and drank and never thanked her.

But that was Miss Falbe's only weakness; she said so to herself at times, when she was alone. Else was she firm, plucky, confident and tirelessly industrious.

In the Ark they stood more in awe of her than of Madam

Speckbom herself; and even the boldest of "the gang" walked on tip-toe when they passed Miss Falbe's landing.

It was a hard, old, creaking stairway, which took its own good time with many stops; but toward the top, it became as steep as a ladder. It was one of Loppen's early pastimes to glide down the bannisters, from the top to the bottom, with a little hop at every landing—that is, when Miss Falbe was at her school.

That lady was always friendly to Loppen, in her somewhat austere way. In the evening, when Madam Speckbom was engaged with her practice, Elsie would sit up in the Falbes' room and read or look at pictures, while the lady corrected compositions. If Christian came home, his sister would cast a hasty look upon him and, according to the result, Elsie was either sent down or permitted to stay.

Then Christian could set to romping or playing chess with her; and Miss Falbe would look up from her compositions, with her handsome smile, when they laughed heartily at one another.

However, Loppen enjoyed herself much more up in the attic, with "the gang." There was a peculiar, mysterious dusk spread over all the wonderful corners and cramped recesses up there. Besides, one was never sure who lived there, for the company changed constantly. Sometimes

there were only two or three of the steady tenants; then it would swarm with people in every corner—all men, who slept, played cards, drank, or put their heads together and whispered.

The chief person of the garrets was Puppelena, a large, robust woman, with dark hair, small eyes and an uncommonly thick underlip. She leased all the rooms up there, immediately from Madam Speckbom, which was very convenient for the Madam. But otherwise the relations between the two ladies were not without disturbances. For "the gang" was a great annoyance to the house with music, noise, and the like; besides it placed the Ark in bad repute throughout the whole town.

But, however that might be, Puppelena did not let herself be dislodged. Many times Madam had given her notice, and twice Puppelena went too. But after a short time a compromise was effected and she returned to the Ark—just like the dove with the olive-leaf—as old Schirrmeister expressed himself.

Old Schirrmeister was a besotted German musician who had come there with a traveling orchestra many years before. In the beginning he had done well. He played very well on the violin and was besides able to perform respectably, at least, on almost all possible instruments.

So he obtained pupils in the best houses. But little by little he went out of style; drink got the upper hand; and at last he threw his rags together, with his former servant-girl, Lena, whom he was accustomed to call "My Puppe" (or nymph). From that she gained the popular nickname, "Puppelena."

Now the old artist was reduced to living from copying music and from Puppelena's generosity. Under the sloping roof stood his old pianoforte, which served as a table for note-copying, and for eating and drinking; and farthest in by the wall stood the violin case, hidden, dusty, and forgotten.

When Elsie was alone with old Schirrmeister, she could get him to play; but that was not often. For the old musician was so far gone, that it pained him to hear music. So he had to be a little drunk; but then he could play, so it sighed and sobbed in the old piano and Loppen sat breathless on the edge of the bed and sobbed too.

As long as he had something to drink, he would keep on playing while he partly sang, partly told her what it was that he was playing. And in this way he came to paint his youth full of hope and music and enthusiasm; how he had played "Commers mitt den Gottinger studenten," and how the great Spohr had once laid his hand upon his head and said: "He will go high in it."

And old Schirrmeister would toss off his light yellow wig, that she might see the head on which the great master's hand had rested.

"Yes—yes, he has gone high in it, the old hog!" he would say to himself, and look about in his gabled-room, take a swallow and play on.

And Loppen heard and saw all sorts of wonderful things. Beaming pictures spread out before her; elegant ladies and gentlemen, lights, music, roses, carriages, and glossy horses, brides in white satin—and roses again, whose fragrance she could fairly smell.

One summer evening, the dormer-window stood open and the light of the sun, which was setting, fell in crimson over the little musician who sat and played for Elsie with his bottle by his side.

His eyes were moist from drink and emotion, while tenderly and in the cautious way of old age, he performed an adagio from Mozart's Sonatas. That was an especial favor for Elsie; for usually he was not to be induced to play the old classics, when they asked it of him.

But he had noticed that Elsie could follow him. And when he saw how he could sway her to his music, so that the bright eyes now stood full of tears, now opened as if before a revelation, then the old wreck sighed: "She will go high in it, too."

Out in the garret a wonderful clatter was heard, and some one took hold of the door.

"Tra-tra-tra! the drummer is there!" shouted Schirrmeister, and struck up a gay march.

The door opened and in came a drum, strapped to a long, spare fellow in a blue uniform coat with long skirts. Next came a big, fat man with a flute under his arm.

One needed only to see his underlip to know at once that he was Puppelena's brother. But whether the flute was to blame or it lay in his temperament, his lip was much thicker, and hung twice as far down.

This person had in his day been steward (Okonomen) in the prison but had been discharged. And now he lived at his sister's "pension" as he said. Among "the gang" he went under the sobriquet, Olkonomen (from Ol or ale); and so far as one could discover, he did not do a single, blessed thing but drink, play the flute, and run errands for his sister.

There was something mysterious, by the way, about these errands, which were always undertaken after dark. Olkonomen's long, double-breasted coat was singularly stuffed when he went out; but when, comparatively thin, he returned, his sister threw herself upon him, like a hawk, before any one else got a hand on him; for it was the common opinion in "the gang" that after such expeditions, he brought home money.

Loppen knew both Olkonomen and Jorgen Tambur well; she rose at once and made room for them as well as she could.

Jorgen Tambur had brought with him two bottles of ale, and a quart of brandy for the concert. Olkonomen winked mysteriously and said he had sent a message; something he always said. Nobody knew what kind of a message it was or where it was sent; but they all knew perfectly well that it would never be answered.

Meanwhile, old Schirrmeister cast a deprecating look at the drinkables and announced that he would not play that day.

"Orders from Puppelena," said Jorgen Tambur and at that moment she herself thrust her head in at the door and said in an uncommonly kind tone: "Well? You are not playing? Perhaps it might be a little something to drink?"

"No—no—does the blessed sun shine to-day?" shouted old Schirrmeister and Olkonomen nodded and wiped the keys of his instrument with a red handkerchief, while Jorgen Tambur thoughtfully put the brandy into his breast pocket, and the two bottles of ale deep down in the long skirts of his coat; when Puppelena was going to treat, he could save his for another time.

The concert opened with a Rondo Grazioso by Furstenau. Olkonomen had once really been able to play Furstenau; but

with the years, a veil of spit, so to speak, had laid itself over his playing, and his fingers were so thick and stiff that he held them out straight when he played.

Jorgen Tambur performed his part with taste and discretion, when with subdued ruffs he covered up where Olkonomen's trills and runs spent themselves in splutter and wind. But old Schirrmeister accompanied from his own head.

He must have been pretty far gone to take part in these trios; and at times, in his pain and shame, he played so wild an accompaniment, that surely poor Furstenau would hardly have recognized his peaceful Rondo Grazioso.

When they were well under way, Puppelena peeped in at the door, and a moment after, two young fellows came in; they looked like day laborers or the like. One was one-eyed, and Loppen knew that he was a tinker; on the contrary, the other was a strange fellow who at once set to work making court to her. Elsie preferred to sit in peace and listen to the music which she found exquisite; but aside from that, she was so used to having the men up there pinch her and be familiar, that she did not trouble herself farther about it.

Puppelena herself came in now, as well; and locked the door after her; and at the same time—almost as if he came out of her skirts—one person more appeared; so it was crowded enough in the little room.

He was a small, sallow man. Loppen had seen him there once a short time before, and she had an impression that he was an important personage.

As he sat down on a bench close by the hostess, his little sea-blue eyes ran about into every corner, over all the people, up to the dormer-window, and ended over by the door where the bolt was caught and the key turned.

His face was thin and pale as if he had lived long in the dark; his hair was light-red, almost white, and clipped close, with great ridges about the temples. He had whiter hands than the others; but they were seldom to be seen, for he had a habit of sitting on them.

Loppen had to look across at him every minute; he had such a wonderful face; but the most wonderful of all was, that he had a new one every time she looked over at him. And when he noted her surprise, he set to making grimaces, and at last made so hideous a face that Loppen gave a little scream and started up.

But then he laughed silently, without a sound, and showed his yellow teeth. Then a whispered conversation began between him and Puppelena; different things which Loppen could not see went from hand to hand under the table. The tinker and the other young fellow were drawn into this private conversation. But every time the music made a halt,

Puppelena shouted to them encouragingly and the artists recovered themselves in a hurry and played on.

But in the midst of an excellent allegro spirituoso, when Olkonomen's flute wandered off in trills and runs, so it was a pleasure to listen, there was a knock at the door.

The man of the many faces vanished in a trice under Puppelena's chair; and Elsie saw with astonishment that her cavalier and the tinker had all at once turned to playing cards — with cards which must have fallen down from the roof. Yes, they were already in a hot dispute about a jack of clubs.

"But Jorgen — how you drum!" cried Schirrmeister, offended; for, after drinking, Jorgen Tambur became more fiery; he remembered the proud time when he drummed for the people's assembly or beat the alarm in the streets when there was a fire.

"Hush!" commanded Puppelena when there was a second knock. The trio became silent.

"Who knocks?" asks the hostess in an insolent tone.

A voice answered from without.

"Open it," said Puppelena, reassured. "It is only Miss Falbe.'

The tinker drew the bolt, turned the key and opened the door.

Miss Falbe remained standing on the threshold and ex-

changed a look with Puppelena, which was not very friendly, to say the least. Then she said quietly, and without heeding the others: "Come, Elsie; you must not stay here."

Elsie arose, shame-faced, and went with her. There was no one in "the gang" who dared grumble. When they came to Miss Falbe's door she took Loppen about the waist and said:

"Dear Elsie, promise me that you will never go up there again. You are now a grown girl; you must understand that it will not do for you to be with bad men."

Elsie grew red as blood and promised, with tears, that she would never go up to "the gang" again. And when she was by herself, down in her own little bed-room, she repeated her promise as she undressed herself.

Miss Falbe was right; they were indeed bad men — those up in the attic. It was better to attend Madam Speckbom's patients, or sit with Miss Falbe and read of an evening.

But before she went to bed she had to look after her roses in the window, for Elsie loved roses.

She took care of all Madam Speckbom's flowers, and Madam had flowers in all her windows. But Elsie took the best care of the roses; and when they were about to bloom, she got permission to keep them in her own room, for the morning sun shone there.

There were three or four half blossomed out, and she inhaled the delicate, fresh fragrance while she leaned over them. And with that fragrance from her roses, came visions of all sorts of wonderful things; elegant ladies and gentlemen, lights, music, carriages and glossy horses, and music again, which she heard trembling far in the distance.

And when she crept into bed she did not think of Madam Speckbom's patients or of Miss Falbe's quiet room; but she slept in the midst of roses and music and dreams of white satin with swan's down about the shoulders. She was seventeen years old.

* * * * *

Life in the Ark went its broken way with a kind of regularity. Madam Speckbom waged her silent war with Dr. Bentzen; Miss Falbe toiled on with her school and with her brother; and "the gang" led their mysterious life above.

For a long time Elsie kept from going to the attic until one day she heard old Schirrmeister playing. She had such a longing to see if he was alone; there could be no harm in that.

He was not alone; but when she was once there, she staid there anyhow. And little by little, all became as before; except that now she did everything to keep her visits a secret from Miss Falbe.

Such was Madam Speckbom's Ark, and in all that Elsie grew up.

II.

YES, but we must bear in mind, ladies and gentlemen, that it not only concerns us here to come to the help of oppressed humanity in the aggregate; but that we have set ourselves at the task of working within distinct boundaries. Therefore, while with all my heart I can concur in the views advanced by Consul With, at the same time, I must insist that we should not go beyond our proper limits. It is possible enough that need —and what now especially interests us, moral depravity among young girls—that it may be just as great—yes, perhaps much greater in St. Paul's parish than here in St. Peter's. But I believe, indeed, that

if our labors are really to bring forth visible fruits for blessing, we should confine ourselves to the bounds indicated by God himself, and that is—I think—our own parish."

"Oh, how true that is that the chaplain says;" said Mrs. Bentzen joyfully. "It is just as it was before I took my own poor. All that I gave, that we poured forth, it disappeared without doing any good, and there were only more and more, who came and begged. But now I only let the maid say: 'We have our own to take care of.' So one is sure that no unworthy person gets it, and so one can see the invisible fruits—no, blessed fruits. How was it the chaplain expressed it; it was at once so true and so graceful?"

"Visible fruits for blessing," said the chaplain with a modest blush.

"Yes—that was it," said the lady, and repeated the words half aloud, so as to remember them.

"I, for my part, do not even think that it is right to give and help indiscriminately," said the young wife of the new chief of police, and modestly cast down her handsome eyes.

The chaplain bowed in acknowledgment to the lady, and remarked that it was also said in the Scriptures, that it is not right to take bread from children and cast it before small dogs. Besides, he added some comments, in which he again insisted that the institution for fallen women, which they were

met there to organize, ought to confine its labors strictly within the limits of St. Peter's parish.

Merchant With, had, in fact, not the least objection to that. He had spoken some common-place words on the spur of the moment, in order to say something. Now he had to explain that it had been his intention as it were in large outlines—hem—to give a suggestion of what according to his —hem—opinion should be done concerning this—hem—this social evil.

The chaplain complimented him on the valuable contribution the Consul had made to the illumination of the matter. After which the discussion on that point was considered at an end, and the name proposed by the chaplain was adopted: The Institution for Fallen Women in St. Peter's Parish.

Consul With stroked his black moustache, and stole an opportunity to look at his watch. It was his wife who had compelled him to take part in this meeting, at which no men except himself and the chaplain were to be found. Aside from them, it was a selection of the finest ladies of the town, who had come together on this occasion at the solicitation of the chaplain. Consul With was included, because they desired one of the town's wealthiest and best names among the founders.

Malicious men might perhaps think that Consul With

looked a little strange in an organization of just that character; for in reality, he did not have the best reputation.

Some found an excuse for him, in the circumstance that Consul With had done almost the same as Kierkegaard has it that Luther did, namely, married an ironing-board. For Mrs. With was certainly one of the flattest, one's eyes were like to meet.

Others thought she deserved nothing better, for being so foolish as to imagine that the handsome Otto With had chosen her for anything but old sailor Randulf's money.

But the Consul himself was so easy and smooth, so companionable and affable that the reports slid off from him. Those who knew him intimately, laughed at him; he was now quite beyond reformation: but the most thought that he was not so bad as was told.

Meanwhile matters were progressing; the preliminary labors were discussed and divided among those who were present. That, in its turn, was not without its difficulties, and the chaplain had to be careful to the last degree, to maneuver among all these ladies without offending somebody.

He noticed, especially, that there were several of the ladies who aspired to the post of secretary of the Institution. And that was partly the chaplain's own fault. For he had, half in sport, described it as interesting and responsible in this

way to keep a big, thick register with red and blue headings.

The police-chief's wife seemed to have been especially smitten by this thick register; and every time the secretaryship came under discussion, she let her handsome eyes rest upon the chaplain in a shy appeal.

But there were others who might be worthier of that distinction. First, there was Mrs. With, in whose elegant parlors the meeting was taking place, and from whom they expected the heaviest contribution. But the chaplain had shrewdly devised a compromise with her by making her husband, Consul With, chairman of the Institution.

Then there was the wealthy Mrs. Fanny Garman, from Sandsgaard? To be sure, she looked as if she was only bored and did not trouble herself about anything; but it might be that she would take a slight illy; one can never be sure about it.

And then it was a great problem, too, whether properly he ought not tender his pastor's wife this secretaryship. Pastor Martens had, in his wife's behalf, accepted the invitation to take part in the organization. But he had added, to be sure, that, although his Lena was interested with heart and soul in the matter, yet she was so weakly that, like a quiet housewife, she remained entirely within the sheltered en-

closure of her home. Neither was she present at the meeting.

The chaplain began to grow uneasy; he was comparatively strange in the parish; and the founding of this Institution for Fallen Women in St. Peter's parish was really to be his great debut. Now he felt the difficulties already; this secretary-ship—what was he to do with it? But while he was sitting and writhing in all these considerations, there was a knock at the door, and Miss Falbe walked in.

After a hasty salutation to Mrs. With, she began curtly and emphatically, turning to the assembled company:

"I have been informed that you are organizing a society for rescuing young girls; and as I thought there might be a rush for places, I have made haste to present a young girl who very badly needs rescue from her environment. You certainly know her too, Mrs. Bentzen; it is little Elsie, at Madam Speckbom's."

Mrs. Bentzen tossed her head and brushed a thread off of her dress —of course she knew her; everybody knew the little out-cast; but she must plainly understand—

Several of the other ladies also muttered and whispered to each other; but Consul With was so unguarded as to call out:

"Ah! you mean Loppen, Miss Falbe—a handsome—hem, hem!"

It did no good to cough; the ironing-board sent him a look and Mrs. Garman laughed openly behind her large fan. But Miss Falbe continued her recommendation, describing all the temptations of life at the Ark.

"That Miss Falbe can bear to live at such a house," said the ironing-board aside.

Miss Falbe forced herself to be silent. But when no one seemed disposed to make any response, the little wife of the chief of police said:

"Pardon, I am yet so strange here; but does the young girl you speak of, live within the bounds of St. Peter's parish?"

That keen-witted question made so good an impression on the chaplain, that he decided she should have the secretaryship. But it was soon brought to light that the Ark really was inside the limits of St. Peter's parish; and then again ensued a short, painful pause. For every one was anxious to oppose Miss Falbe, but no one saw what excuse they were to give.

Then the chaplain said: "Pardon, Miss Falbe; but as you know the object of this institution, you also understand what class of people in society we are starting out to rescue. Allow me, therefore, one question: Is the girl proposed by you, a fallen woman?"

"That I do not know," answered Miss Falbe hurriedly,

and colored; but just after, she continued composedly: "She is no more than seventeen years old and just on that account I hoped she could be saved. For, from the surroundings in which she has grown up, it seems to me almost a necessity that she must fall and go down, as we so often see girls in her position do."

"Yes, Miss, to that I must answer, that in the first place I do not share these modern views about necessity. I, for my part, believe—and I am—even if the new wisdom of our times will laugh at me—I am happy to believe that right there, where human eyes see the certain, the necessary way to destruction, that right there is the place for God's loving providence. And as to the matter itself," added the chaplain, and looked about among the company, "I must now repeat what I have already had the honor to point out in this connection—that, just as have we found it our duty to confine our labors to a certain parish, so we must also maintain that our work of rescue comprehend a distinct class of our fellow men. That, too, we have intended to indicate in the name we have chosen: The Institution for Fallen Women—so only for the unfortunates whom we designate fallen women—of St. Peter's Parish."

This address was received with subdued, but warm approval, by all the ladies around the table; and several

might be heard—"certainly," "that is clear," "it must be that way of course."

For a moment it looked as if Miss Falbe would return a sharp answer; she was often that unaccountable; but she stopped and let it pass with a dry apology, "that she had mistaken," as she expressed it.

Then she left the company.

"That's always the way with Miss Falbe," exclaimed Mrs. With, when the door was closed "Something disagreeable's always tagging after her."

"She is so dreadfully severe," said Mrs. Bentzen.

"I fear she lacks the proper spirit," said the chaplain with a mild solemnity.

"So far as I know," insinuated the police-chief's wife in her guileless tone, "Miss Falbe is not a member of any charitable organization in town."

"No, we had her with us at first in the Foundling's Home," answered Mrs. Bentzen. "But she was so unmanageable and domineering, and at last came the story of the quack doctor."

This story was then related. It was the more suitable for the occasion, as it turned just on this same Elsie, whom Miss Falbe had presented. The wife of the police-chief inquired very anxiously about the difference between the ages of Miss

Falbe and the young girl—a shrewdness which the chaplain could not fail to recognize to himself.

When just then Dr. Bentzen came in—he was the family physician—they had already had a full account of the whole scandal.

When he heard what they were talking about, he turned his red nose up in air, and began to rake down the Ark from top to bottom, in a torrent of words. It was a disgrace to the whole town; Puppelena was a thieves' go-between, who kept a dolt of a musician to fool the police. Miss Falbe and her brother were of about the same stripe; but when he came to Madam Speckbom and Loppen, he talked himself into such a fury that his wife, as was her wont, had to go over to him, and soothe him, and gently push him out of doors.

After these interruptions they could not get affairs under way again. Mrs. Fanny Garman had buttoned her gloves, and they had seen the Sandsgaard horses before the window long ago. Mrs. Fanny had not opened her mouth, except to gape. Now and then she made a grimace of weariness to Consul With, which he answered when he dared.

The chaplain would have preferred to close with a little benediction. But it did not happen so. The ladies' silk dresses rustled and crackled so much as they now began to rise, that he did not manage to begin.

This Institution was besides a little different from the numerous missions and charitable associations, where religious people are usually so prominent. The most of the ladies present commonly did not take part in such affairs; and it had been precisely the chaplain's design for this Institution to gather the most aristocratic ladies, who would otherwise confine themselves to furnishing financial support alone.

By this, it was by no means his intention to make his Institution more aristocratic and exclusive than the other organizations of the town. But he was of the opinion that the ministers of our day pay too much attention to the middle class, and neglect to admonish those who stand highest in society, and think themselves in the possession of the loftiest culture.

That was the idea he wished to carry out.

But the town understood him, alas! not at all. And just as competition and strong rivalry always hold sway among the innumerable organizations for all sorts of missions and the numberless swarms of bazaar-committees for every imaginable purpose, so they were all united in looking with envious eyes upon this new rival—this aristocratic, highly-connected Institution for Fallen Women of St Peter's Parish—with Consul With for chairman.

ADAM SPECKBOM had some practice, too, in the suburbs of the city; and she was very proud when a carriage, or even a gig, stopped before her door.

Elsie was now and then permitted to go with her when there was room; and these trips were, in fact, all that Loppen saw of country life. Otherwise, she never went beyond the narrow, crooked streets of the town; or, at most, stole a boat and rowed a way out in the bay.

But one pleasant day toward the last of August, she was permitted to go into the country with Madam; a call

had come from Consul With's brick-works, where the foreman's wife was one of Madam's old patients.

The whole Ark was in a commotion because of the event, and all the children of the neighborhood stood in awe about the gig to see Madam Speckbom climb in. Christian Falbe stood above and nodded; "the gang" had gathered around the front window of the garret, from which they could see the gig drive away; and they shouted and winked at Loppen. She turned, beaming with delight, and laughed so it rang in the narrow street.

The sun was not really bright yet. It shone violet-grey through the motionless, heavy, autumn fog which rose from the water and damp marshes, and mingled with the dark brown, morning smoke from all the chimneys down in the town.

But when they came up higher, there was no more fog, except far below, where a dot still hung over the parks or over the big trees by the church. And it grew warm and quite clear, so one could glimpse the strip of open sea, out in the west. But over the fjord with its islands, and the lofty, blue mountains, down over the meadows and golden harvest-fields, and up over the hillocks and patches of heather, which were blue with blossoms, over all lay the early autumn morning, so peacefully—so peacefully and softly.

Loppen laughed and talked so much at first that Madam Speckbom bade her hold her tongue. Madam had rather entertain herself with the coach boy, who stood behind, about the state of health and things in general out in the country.

Elsie held her tongue then, not just because she cared so much about what Madam said, but gradually she lost all desire to talk.

She began to enjoy it more by herself—all that she saw around her. She no longer cried out, every time she saw a cow; but it made her happy to think how good it seemed to walk about and feed in the fresh, cool grass.

It was quite motionless; and the water which came and vanished among the hills was as bright as a mirror. The rye was light golden; but the oats yet had flecks of green, down in the valleys, where the soil was deep. The heavy, short heads hung low, after the wind which had blown the day before; and over all was such a warm, ripe fragrance.

But when they had gone so far from town, that the fields ceased and the heather spread in great, violet tufts on both sides of the road; then the air became so oppressively rich that Elsie threw her breath all out several times, and clasped her bosom; it felt as if her bodice was too tight.

All this beauty of nature, of which she knew so little, filled her with a kind of pain, so that tears came into her eyes. She

reviewed all her little short-comings, and thought she was not good enough to be shone upon by this blessed sun.

But after that, she felt a boundless, warm vigor flow through her, from head to foot. All at once she became so happy, so secure, so thankful for everything, to everybody, that she would have leaped out of the gig into the arms of anybody whatsoever—only to give thanks, because she was so happy, so overwhelmingly happy. She thought she owed all the world so much.

For a presentiment of a great, great boon in store for her came over her; she leaned back as well as she could in the humped-up gig and gave herself up to dreaming.

But it was not the old dreams about the bride and carriages, It was a new dream; great, wonderful, formless, almost dreadful.

Elsie stole a chance to open a couple of buttons in her dress to get at her bodice; it was really too tight.

When they arrived, it was Loppen who felt like telling Madam to hold her tongue, so deep was she in her dreams and so painful was it to be torn out of them.

The foreman's house lay a little away from the other buildings of the brick-works; and while Madam went in to see her patient, Elsie looked about through the long building, with shelves instead of walls.

Still half in her dream, she walked and looked at all the wonderful things, and everything to-day made a peculiar, unreal impression upon her.

She paid no attention to the workmen, who moved about her, grimy and besmeared with clay; but she was a long time standing and watching the big water wheel, which drove the clay mills. At the back side of the wheel, as the buckets went over, hundreds and thousands of minute drops of water sprang off; they leaped up in arches, and fell in little, pearly stars, which glittered against the dark wheel as it turned around.

It was cool and refreshing below the water-wheel, and the regular beat of the buckets as they splashed around, and the bright pearls of water dancing before her eyes, ensnared her into new dreams, until some one cried out to her. She stood directly in the way of a giant, who came groaning in from the clay-bank with a heavy load for the tile mills.

Elsie walked in through the long passage-ways where building brick stood piled in rows like psalm-books—high over her head and far, far ahead of her, clear to the end of the passage, where she saw some very little people moving about out in the sunshine.

Through the roof where there were broken tiles, a sunbeam broke here and there, and drew a long, glowing streak

aslant down through the air, and fixed a round sun-spot on the floor.

The sparrows which had had their nests up there, still maintained a sinful life, with battles and bickerings. From the passage near by, came the rapid beating of the paddles which made the bricks smooth before they dried; far in the distance a lusty young fellow was singing a mournful love ditty as he worked; and through it all the big water-wheel went on splashing, patiently and monotonously, and drove the mills so they creaked.

Elsie heard voices and turned curiously into a side passage; there were three young boys shaping brick. Her eyes at once fixed themselves on the one who stood at the moulding-table and pressed the brick into the moulds.

He might have been nineteen or twenty years old, with coal-black hair, a little curly about the ears, eye-brows large and rather heavy; but when he now glanced up from his work he fixed a pair of dark, almost black eyes on Elsie.

She looked away and colored. Never in her life, thought she, had she seen anything so handsome. He had a little, dark down under the nose; else the mouth could as well have been a girl's mouth, so red and tender was it

Elsie at once thought it was the mouth she had dreamed about all day.

She went a step beyond the passage; but turned and drew near again on tip-toe. Then she heard some one in the side passage saying:

"By George, you must know her, Svend! She blushed so when she saw you."

Svend smiled; she could just see his mouth through the piles of brick. Then he wiped his forehead with his bare arms, and so besmeared himself worse with clay, and said:

"That was a deuce of a pretty woman."

Loppen thought that was neatly spoken beyond comparison, and she felt proud and flattered. Softly she stole away to enjoy her triumph in solitude.

Very soon, however, she had to go back again; but just then the dinner-bell rang. The laborers streamed out of the alleys and down to the sea to wash a little before dinner; and a little boy came to call Elsie. She was to dine with Madam at the foreman's house.

In the afternoon, Madam had a few calls to make at the neighboring farms and Elsie was to go along. But she seemed so inattentive and clumsy that Madam Speckbom lost all patience and said she had better go where she pleased.

Loppen laughed, and ran down to the brick-works again. It was almost four o'clock. As soon as Svend caught sight of her, he declared that he would stop for that day. The

others wished him to go on until the usual tale was reached; but he threw down the mould and went away to dress himself.

His fellows growled, but let him have his way; they knew that he could be just as obstinate at times as he was usually good humored; and, besides, there was wild blood in Svend; that is, he was from the gypsies and they are dangerous to cross.

When a little later, he presented himself before Elsie in a clean collar, a blue suit, and round hat, she scarcely recognized him. She was altogether taken with his charms. However, she soon noticed that he was more awkward and rustic than she had supposed, and it was not many minutes before she felt quite superior.

After she had asked him about different things, he offered to show her about the factory. And then, he all at once regained his speech; yes, he even laughed at her once or twice when she was too dumb.

They now walked through the long passages together, while he explained to her everything they saw; he took her clear up on the furnace, where she could peep down on the glowing brick which were being fired.

All this was pleasant to Loppen, just as everything that day was pleasant. Only to walk at his side and hear him

talk was a pleasure; and that she did not understand half that he was explaining, that was just in line with this wonderful day with all its new impressions and new dreams.

But Elsie was sent for once more. Madam Speckbom was through and was ready to go to town. There was no other way than to comply. Loppen dragged herself up to the foreman's house where Madam was already seated in the gig.

"Come on, Elsie," she cried impatiently. "It is almost seven o'clock. We must be home by dark."

Loppen took courage; "May I not walk to town? it is such lovely weather."

Madam Speckbom looked at Svend and smiled.

"Aha! you have good company, sure enough, I must say. Well, well! Suit yourself then, Elsie; but don't be too late coming home;"—with that Madam drove off.

She was a very liberal lady, Madam Speckbom, and she saw nothing wrong in the young people being out together in the delightful evening; besides she thought well of Svend's face.

The two young people walked slowly toward the sea, while Madam took the direct road to town. Loppen was happy over her fortune; but when she a little coquettishly

asked Svend if he would accompany her to town, that bungler answered: "Of course I will."

Loppen felt a little exasperated at that; she was used to gallant cavaliers. But he regained all her favor by climbing the hedge into the bellman's garden, and stealing a rose for her from a bush which could not be seen from the house.

It was only a simple, pale red garden rose which was left hanging still after the real flowering. But it had the fragrance still—the fragrance of roses which belonged to her dreams.

And while she walked along by his side in the fragrance, she felt again that overwhelming desire to give thanks, to share with some one her good fortune. She could have thrown herself about his neck, have kissed him, have committed the most incredible follies; but he walked a little apart from her, and looked so cold and serious that she was ashamed of herself.

Yet he was even then walking along, tormenting himself with the same matter. He was so dreadfully anxious that they should sit down on the heather and talk with each other; but he was careful not to propose it.

There had been a slight breeze at noon; but at evening it was again motionless. The fjord lay smooth as glass, with bright circles where a bird had just dipped, or with long,

waving lines behind a fisher-boat which was going out on the sound to catch cod.

There was not a chirrup from the birds; there was not the least sound from anything; but a mellow, wooing silence in which one might hide himself, to whisper something to some one which no one must hear.

For Elsie felt again as if her bosom would burst out. She walked along, bending over her rose.

And as they walked along in this way, little by little they came closer to each other; and at last they came as close to each other as they could; they no longer talked, but drew quick breaths; she stumbled and took him by the arm; he clasped her hand to him and thus they went a few steps without conscious thought.

But a carriage came rapidly down over the hill behind them. The coachman cried out to them and they sprang one to each side.

It was Consul With, who was returning from his brick-works. When he caught sight of Elsie, he had the carriage stop, leaped out and took her by the hand.

"Good evening, little miss; you are going to town, are you not? Come and ride with me."

Elsie would have made excuses; but he fairly lifted her into the carriage. She at once recognized the rich, distin-

guished Consul With, and was partly too abashed to oppose him; and perhaps it partly arose before her what a high honor it was to ride in his carriage.

But as they bowled away, she became frightened completely. She caught but a glimpse of Svend, who stood astounded by the roadside; then the carriage ran down from a second hill and he was out of sight.

Besides she had enough to handle in the Consul, who put his arm about her waist and tried to kiss her on the neck.

Loppen was used to such things, and to keeping men away from her. But it was another affair altogether, now. She could not cuff Consul With, whom all the town saluted and who was so elegant.

Besides he was so old—thought she; and finally she was so possessed and strangely unnerved by this long day with the many new things; it all blended together before her; she did not clearly realize who it was she was sitting with in the dark carriage; all the time she was thinking of Svend, and was so confused that she felt so very, very fortunate and tired.

In summer Consul With lived in a villa down by the fjord. He had the coachman drive into the enclosure; but alit with Elsie at the garden gate. She did not wish to go in with him; but he seized her by the hand.

"Oh! my rose!" cried Elsie; he had broken off all its petals.

"Only come along, and you shall have all the roses you want," he whispered and drew her with him.

It was quite dark in the narrow walk between the bushes, where he let her go before him.

She begged him to let her go home—half deferentially yet, but he answered only in jest.

Close to the house stood some rare, yellow roses; the Consul looked up at the windows, then stole up to them, and cut them all off with his pen-knife.

Elsie had her hands full; she had to thank him indeed; they were so lovely there in the dusk; and they had a peculiar, fine perfume which she had never smelled; they were roses and yet they were not her roses.

But when he opened a small door at the rear of the house, it ran through her that that was for no good purpose. She tried to flee; but he seized her nimbly about the waist, drew her inside, and closed the door.

IV.

THE Institution for Fallen Women of St. Peter's Parish was thus brought into active existence, and the Police-Chief's wife was not a little proud of her register. It was a thick, solemn book, in yellowish parchment, with red-leather back and the Institution's name in gilt letters.

Otherwise the work of the Institution was yet preparatory; for the endowments were not yet sufficient to establish a separate foundation with buildings and managers. Besides, it was rather slow work to collect the support; public opinion was not enthusiastic. Neither did it seem so easy to find the fallen women of St. Peter's Parish.

But then that was not the Secretary's business. She held open office in her drawing-room every morning from ten to eleven; the register lay opened at the first page, where as yet there stood nothing but the headings above the columns: Name, age, by whom presented, etc. At one side stood the ink-stand with a decorated quill-pen for ornament and a new steel-pen to write with.

But no one came, and the lady was oftentimes a little impatient. Now and then meetings were held, or the chap-

lain called on her to talk about the Institution's affairs. In this way it was her part to talk about these things with a young man, and her handsome eyes had often to droop deep down over the register. But it was still an inspiring feeling —so the chaplain said—that one should, in her own purity, have an eye for the evil about her, and do what was in human power to rescue the fallen.

At home at the Ark they lived as they could, but not always as they should. The man of the many faces had shown himself several times, and upon these visits always ensued a mutual prosperity and an obliging mood in the sulky hostess.

The trio-concerts were therefore flourishing, and they not only extended to poor Fürstenau, but also Onslow and Kalliwoda—yes, even Father Haydn had to give himself up to be trilled by Olkonomen, drummed by Jorgen Tambur, and pounded by old Schirrmeister, who played like a madman, and drank—like a Dutch musician.

During the autumn Christian Falbe had one of his very worst periods; and that engrossed his sister so much that she did not take notice how pale and changed Elsie had become.

Madam Speckbom, on the other hand, noticed it quick enough; but she smiled her philosophical smile; when young folks are in love, it looks just like that for a time.

The moment she saw Svend and Elsie together, she said to herself: "That will be a match." They mated each other so completely—that Madam saw at once, and she had a sure eye in such matters.

So when Svend presented himself one Saturday afternoon, awkward and embarrassed, Madam Speckbom treated him very kindly indeed, and bade him be seated on the sofa, while she went into the kitchen to call Elsie.

But Elsie was not there; she was nowhere, she was not to be found. She only came to light a good while after Svend had at last gone away. Madam scolded her, but nevertheless smiled shrewdly to herself; for that symptom she understood, too; girls act just so when they are the most seriously smitten.

During the first few days Elsie had not lifted her eyes. She took hold of the housework very actively, and never went out. But through the night she wept for shame and anguish; every morning she expected the whole world had learned of it.

But as day after day slipped by without anything happening whatsoever, and as everything went on as before, without the least attention to her, she began to think that perhaps it was not so dangerous after all. There was an anxiety over her which was new; neither could she laugh as of

old; but her light disposition soon helped her over the worst of it and, little by little, she regained her good, sound sleep and her bright eyes.

But Svend she would not see. Every time she thought of him, she blushed red as fire; it was much harder to think of him than of the other.

She had seen the Consul walk by the house several times at dusk; but to her joy she knew that he did not dare to come in. But almost every evening that Madam Speckbom was out, a middle-aged woman came, who was so smiling and pleasant. She invited Elsie so persistently to call on her; she lived near by, down on Strand street. But at the same time she sedulously enjoined her not to mention a word to Madam Speckbom about her visits.

But one evening there was a terrible scene. Madam Speckbom had caught a strange man in the dark entry; and as he would not give his name, Madam resolutely threw open the door to the drawing-room, where Elsie was sitting with the lamp.

A single glance at the young girl's distracted face, when it was seen that it was Consul With she had caught, was enough for Madam. She knew the Consul so thoroughly that she saw it all in an instant; and Madam Speckbom had no respect for him, at least. So he was hustled out of doors with

a powerful thrust, and attended by a stream of abuse and curses which the elegant gentleman pocketed with exquisite grace—glad to get away.

But then Madam had a settlement with Elsie, which ended by driving her out of doors that self-same evening.

For, as she said, had it been some one else—for instance, the boy at the brick-yards—she should not have had a word to say, but should rather have helped them to come together and begin house-keeping. No one could say of Madam Speckbom that she was hard on young folks. But throw herself away on such an old hog as Consul With—no! no! if Elsie did not hold herself any higher than that, then she could remain no longer under Madam Speckbom's roof.

The usually mild-tempered lady was raging, now that she had once become angry. And this had stirred and vexed her to the uttermost. Such a boundless falseness in Elsie, to fool her with the boy from the brick-works—her, Madam Speckbom, who had so sure an eye in such matters—and then, Consul With! No, there could be no question at all that Elsie had shown the blackest ingratitude, and was a detected false and giddy thing.

Loppen was standing out in the dark street before she fairly had her wits again. She had cried at first; but now she stopped to think it over. Her greatest fear was whether

Madam would hold her peace, or whether everybody would hear of it.

It was cold where she was standing; the wind was blowing and she was without a wrap. She decided to go to a friend of hers, who worked in the neighborhood, and wait awhile; perhaps Madam would reconsider.

Loppen staid with her friend for the night, and the next morning she went over to Madam Speckbom's house. But Madam saw her as she came down the hill and shut the door in her face.

Then only did Elsie realize that she was cast out in earnest; and her misfortune fell upon her with sudden force which seemed about to crush her. She slunk into the narrowest streets along the beach and walked along sobbing, with bowed head, without noticing where she was going.

Then she met the pleasant woman who had called on her several times.

"Poor, little Elsie!" said the kind woman. "What have they been doing to you? Come in with me; I live near by, and there you shall have such a good time and no one shall touch you. Come, my child."

It made Elsie unspeakably happy to hear these friendly words, and she gladly went with her.

The house was rather small and lay hidden between two

big warehouses which belonged to Consul With. The woman took her up into a cosy, little room which looked toward the sea. Farther in was a yet smaller and yet cosier bed-chamber.

"See! you can stay here as long as you like," said the woman and fondled her; "I have expected you to come ever so long."

Elsie was even then not much astonished.

In the dreams she had been wont to dream to Schirrmeister's music, it had been quite like this and yet more wonderful. And the last few weeks, with all their mighty upheavals and emotions, had so shattered reality for her that she neither doubted nor questioned, but let herself float with the current—happy and content at being freed from that horrible desolation which she had felt for a time.

It was only when the pleasant woman, quite *en passant*, mentioned Consul With while she was changing her stockings—there were stockings, too, ready in the bureau—that Elsie realized it with a pang; she arose from the sofa and tried to flee.

But the woman clung to her and talked away so feelingly about the kind Consul, told so many generous and gentle things of him; and besides—where would she fly to?

Loppen lay down on the sofa again; and when the pleas-

ant woman shortly after brought in coffee, eggs and wheat-bread on a salver with a white napkin, she fell to eating and amusing herself at watching the boats row by out on the bay.

During the fall and winter, Elsie lived there and had a pleasant time. Little by little she accustomed herself to the Consul, who was kind and good-humored. She went out very seldom, and there were some of her acquaintances whom she was dreadfully afraid to meet. On the contrary, others stopped and talked with her, looked at and felt of all she wore; and their envy was a sort of compensation to her. But before Miss Falbe she was so afraid that she ran whenever she saw her out on the street.

And then, she was still more afraid of Svend. She knew that he had come to town after the work at the brick-yards had stopped in the fall; and one evening she noticed that he was following her along Strand street.

She hurried on and locked herself in. Soon she heard him shake the latch and call to her half aloud. But she kept very still and so he went away again.

But a day or so afterwards he was standing in the center of her room before she dreamed of such a thing. Elsie ran to the chamber door to fasten herself in. Meanwhile, Svend stood very quietly and looked about himself. He was changed. His face was no longer handsome and brown as in

the summer, and Elsie could plainly see that he had been carousing of late.

"I know it all, Elsie," he began. "But it makes no difference at all. I have a hundred crowns left from my summer's work; if you will go with me right now, we will get married and go to my uncle's in Arendal, where I am promised work."

Elsie dropped the latch; she was no longer afraid now; but she hung her head for shame and said:

"No, Svend; that you must not ask of me, for I cannot do it. I am much obliged, though, that you did want to."

Svend sat down on a chair by the door, and when he saw that Elsie was crying, he cried too. In this way they wept together for a time, each in his corner.

But suddenly Elsie chanced to think that some one might come. She dried her eyes in a hurry and begged him to go —to go as quick as he could.

Kindly and humbly he let himself be driven away; but he said he would come again.

And he did come again often, at times when they could be undisturbed. Every time she looked at him her shame flamed up again, but constantly a little lighter, until she could sit long hours and talk with him. With a strange, nervous interest she heard how his money grew less and less. She

inquired anxiously about his companions, and when she heard that he had fallen in with some of "the gang," she knew that he was going wrong.

But she did not warn him; neither did she think it so bad. It would have been much, much worse if he had remained as handsome and innocent as when she saw him the first time, now that she herself had sunk so low.

The day he had twenty crowns of his money left, he offered them to her, half confident, half humbly, for a single kiss.

But, both frightened and angry, Elsie drew back; not for all the world would she touch him or his money.

Svend bore it, ashamed, and crouched like a dog that gets a blow. But when he slunk towards the door, she took pity on him and so kissed him for nothing.

So the winter passed away.

But as the days lengthened and brightened through February and March, all sorts of rumors, which had lain quiet, hatching in the darkness of winter, began to rustle their wings, and a new story about Consul With flew blustering from house to house.

The Consul resorted to his usual expedient; he sailed for London on business. And one day the pleasant woman came to Elsie with an altogether new face, in which there

was not the least trace of a smile left, and announced curtly and decidedly, that the Consul had gone away now for a year at least, and Elsie had no further business in the house, but must bundle herself off and not take a thing with her.

Loppen was no longer the same girl as when she was cast out of Madam Speckbom's. She got up and roundly abused the pleasant woman, and there ensued a short-lived brawl, which ended by the woman swearing that Loppen should be out of the house before the sun went down.

"Gladly—very gladly, indeed," answered Elsie; that had long been her intention; she was sick of it all. And when Svend just then came up the stairs, she cried out, with flashing eyes: "Now, I will go with you, Svend."

But Svend seemed more puzzled than happy, and he whispered despondently:

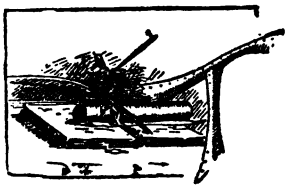
"I haven't a shilling left."

Then Loppen laughed; she laughed so it rang through the house, up the stairs and down the stairs; but Svend was almost frightened.

And beaming, as if it was the grandest triumph in the world, she took his arm and walked past the woman, who stood and laughed at them in disdain.

They went up to "the gang;" at Miss Falbe's door Elsie paused and grew sober; but it was only for a moment.

V.



THE police-chief's handsome wife no longer kept office hours from ten to eleven. She was tired of it.

These preliminary labors dragged along interminably; when the chaplain once had the Institution organized, it seemed as if he had gained his point, and the Institution's farther growth and progress he did not allow to lie so much upon his mind.

At the last meeting he had even, with his customary decision, proposed that the matter should temporarily rest until autumn; for the summer was now at hand, when all the Institution's promoters were going to the baths or into the country; they could, therefore, confine themselves to working secretly—as the chaplain expressed himself—and so meet again, if God will, at autumn with renewed powers.

Working secretly was not to this lady's taste. She desired, on the contrary, to distinguish herself in one way or another; but there was no opportunity, and at last she let the register lie unopened on the desk; but she did let it lie there; it was always a graceful object and every stranger was sure to ask what it was.

One delightful May morning, between ten and eleven, the maid came into her bed-chamber and announced that Miss Falbe was waiting to see her.

At first the lady wished to excuse herself; but when she heard that it concerned the Institution for Fallen Women, at St. Peter's Parish, she made a becoming negligee toilet and went down. But she was a little provoked, anyhow; it was just like Miss Falbe to come at the wrong time.

It was like her, too, not to seem to hear the story of the horrible headache which the lady related; but without further ado, to go straight to the matter in hand.

"You remember, madame," she began, "that some time since I presented a young girl for your Institution? Do you also recall what hindered her reception at that time?"

The lady nodded stiffly.

"This hindrance is now certainly removed,"—Miss Falbe's voice sounded a little sharp as she said it—"The girl has gone astray—to a pitiable degree."

The police-chief's wife did not really see what answer she should make. She assumed a business-like mien and sought for excuses; she felt an instinctive longing to oppose Miss Falbe.

But all at once it occurred to her; here was the most excellent opportunity to distinguish herself; she was the Institu-

tion's secretary, and, although the organization was not yet complete, still she had both money and clothing at her disposal. She looked at the register; the women who received support from the Institution were to be recorded in it.

She made a bold decision and solemnly opened the register.

With a rapid and graceful hand she now at last filled the empty spaces in the first line: Name, age, by whom presented, etc.; all with a business expression as if it were the twentieth time she had done it.

When it was all filled out, Miss Falbe asked:

"Well, as to the baby——"

"The baby!" cried the lady; "Is there a baby?"

"There will be," responded the imperturbable Miss Falbe.

For a moment the poor lady thought she should faint; but her wrath got the upper hand. Flaming red, and with anything but mild eyes, she arose:

"It's a shame for you, Miss Falbe; but that's always the way with you. Now, I must scratch in the register; it is spoiled—all spoiled;" and the lady burst into tears for grief and vexation.

"But what's to be understood by that?" asked Miss Falbe.

"Oh! you know well enough," sobbed the lady. "When there is a baby, you should go to the hospital for poor women

during confinement and not to us. You knew it well—yes, you knew it; I am sure you did."

Miss Falbe smiled; Miss Falbe really smiled a little contemptuously as she went down the steps. Whether she knew it or not, is as well unknown; at any rate, she did not go to the hospital for poor women during confinement.

On the contrary, she went home again to the Ark and hunted up Madam Speckbom. The two ladies were well acquainted, and mutually cherished high regard for each other. When Miss Falbe was really in a strait to procure aid for some poor creature or other she had found, she always knew that Madam Speckbom had a little to spare on a pinch.

And Madam held Miss Falbe infinitely high—mostly, perhaps, because she was the only educated person who had ever shown genuine respect for her medical skill.

Besides, she used to declare that although she had so little to give, there were none of the town's charitable ladies who did so much good and were so well liked as she.

But then when Madam learned that it was Loppen who was to be helped, she shook her curls in disapproval:

"It will do no good with her, miss—I know the blood—so I do!"

Madame Speckbom had missed Loppen so badly that she had almost grown old in six months' time; she had repented,

too, perhaps, but she was of too stern and obstinate a composition ever to acknowledge it.

But Miss Falbe proceeded without allowing herself to be scared off by the curls, telling how it had gone with Elsie of late; she had kept an eye on her as well as she could.

Since early that year, Loppen had been living with the young boy from the brick-works—partly out there, partly in a notorious lodging-house in town.

But he was lazy, and, besides, he drank all the time when he was in town. So Elsie had suffered very much; and what was worse, she had changed so in this short time that when Miss Falbe called and tried to help and counseled her, Loppen had laughed defiantly and said that she would take care of herself.

"Yes, yes—there, you see; that's the kind of a girl she is," muttered Madam.

But Elsie was sick now; and that afternoon when Miss Falbe found her alone—Svend had not shown his face for several days—her defiance was all gone; she wept and was so humble and penitent.

Miss Falbe talked so long about Elsie that Madam thawed; and at evening Loppen was brought home and had her old bed in the little chamber where the morning sun shone in.

At first Elsie did not dare to look Madam in the eye. But

when she had again accustomed herself to the old surroundings, and especially after it was over with, and she had given birth to a miserable, little, still-born child, the old intimacy between them began to return.

"But," said Madam Speckbom, when they had had a long talk about the past, "If, after this, you commit any follies or run away, or if you only a single time go up to Puppelena's, then it will be all over between us—over, once for all."

Elsie felt so certain that such a thing could never happen again; she had gone through too much for that.

And now it was so delightful.

As to Svend, Madam had promised herself that if he would be sober and work, she would help them to get married.

And it was that Elsie lay and thought about; and as her strength slowly waxed with good food and treatment, she began in her old way to dream.

But now they were quite different; her dreams from those when she lay in her virgin bed, and did not really comprehend what she was dreaming of

Now she cast away the horse and swan's-down and longed for a little house close by the brick-works for Svend and herself, and a big rose-bush in front like those in the bellman's garden; oh, when she thought of the bellman's roses!

She could almost recall their fragrance so that she could smell them.

She was too young and light-hearted to grieve long because the child was still-born. And when she was up and began to walk around, she felt happier than she had felt for a long time. Her beauty came back, too; her eyes became bright again and her figure rounded.

One evening, when Madam had just gone out on professional calls, Svend came in.

Elsie was much alarmed, for Madam had forbidden her receiving him; she wanted to talk with Svend herself first.

But she could not drive him away; for that matter, he would not let himself be driven away; it was so long since they had seen each other. Loppen appeased herself by resolving that she would tell Madam when she went home, however it went with her.

But she did not do so. When it came to the point, she had not the courage; and Svend continued calling on her twice a week—especially Saturday evenings.

Whether Madam Speckbom suspected anything, Elsie could not be certain; but it troubled her; yet, she could not bring herself to confess. It was harder, too, the longer it ran on; and at last she had not the slightest desire to talk confidentially with Madam.

There was so much sunshine in July and August, and so little of it came into Madam Speckbom's narrow streets.

Loppen sat by the window and looked up at the sky, and she thought never so long about Svend and the brick-works, and all the bright pearls which leaped from the water-wheel and off the bellman's roses; she breathed heavily; what would she not give for such a rose!

The next Saturday Svend brought her one. There were scores of them, he said; one scented their fragrance clear out on the road, and they hung out over the hedge this year, so one did not have to climb over.

When he had to go again, at half-past eight, so that Madam should not surprise them, Elsie wanted to go to the corner with him. She held the rose in her hand; it was well-nigh ruined, and he teased her to go out with him and pluck a good many.

But she would not; and she walked on and explained to him for the twentieth time how much more sensible it was for her to stay with Madam as long as possible; and then they could better arrange to get married in the fall.

Svend listened patiently to her, and in this way they walked on from corner to corner, across the slopes behind the town. But when he had her so far, he took her about the waist and said:

"Don't be foolish, now, Elsie! What do you want down in that black hospital? Only think how fresh and lovely it is here?"

He was browned again by the sun; the warm gypsy blood flowed up into his cheeks, and his teeth glistened in the twilight. It was impossible for her to withstand him, as bold and ready as he stood there; and happy and careless she ran away with him into the silent, beautiful summer night.

* * * * * * *

"I told you that at the start," cried Madam Speckbom, half-bitterly and half-triumphantly, "she'll stay here, said I, just till she is well, then she'll run off. For I know the blood, that I do; and besides, now I hear that fellow of hers is a gypsy. If I had only known that, he would never have got permission to go with her that accursed evening."

"It might be she would come back yet," interrupted Miss Falbe.

"Yes, just let her try it," cried Madam, menacingly.

"But, Madam Speckbom! You wouldn't tear her to pieces!"

"That I would, Miss Falbe—as sure as my name is Caroline Speckbom. It would be a sin and a shame to help one who will not be helped; there are enough, in all conscience, who need it."

"Yes, but those who will not be helped are just the ones who need help the most."

"Pardon, Miss Falbe; but there's no sense in that. Sometimes you are too bright and learned—just like Dr. Bentzen—that is, you are ten thousand times better—in every direction—oh, there can be no comparison!" added Madam, thoroughly abashed that she had come to compare the excellent Miss Falbe with anything so abominable as Dr. Bentzen.

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It was a hard winter for the poor. It was well to cling to one of the charitable ladies who brought aid from the various institutions. And aid came to many, and did good where it came.

But there were those who were not so fortunate as to reach the aid, and many to whom the aid would not stretch down. For where vice had allied itself with poverty, help might be a curse, and it was a sin to take the bread from the worthy poor, who gave thanks with tears and blessings.

Loppen no longer got aid; all became, in time, tired of her. When she and Svend, late in the autumn, moved in from the brick-works, they lived well for a week or so, on the rest of his summer's wages; but when it was gone, they had nothing at all.

For what Madam Speckbom had once said, that Elsie and Svend suited each other, proved only too true. They were alike light-hearted, alike happy in living well, and alike incapable of saving.

Svend, in this particular, was the better; but he drank it up immediately.

Loppen for a time set about deceiving one after another of the charitable ladies. But when it was over, she was of so bad repute the city over, that she did not know which way to turn.

So she deserted Svend and went with another, who had a few shillings left, came back to him and disappeared again; so no one really knew where she kept herself.

Even Miss Falbe lost sight of her. But at gentlemen's dinners, the chief of police used to quote Loppen as an example of how exceedingly fast, women of the common people go to the bottom when they have once gone astray. And the gentlemen stared moodily down into their champagne glasses, and wondered that moral strength was so poor among the lower classes.

Elsie neither thought nor dreamed any more; she was neither ashamed nor penitent.

From day to day she struggled on through misery;

laughed when it went merrily, with food and drink, and ran the town over when she was in want.

At last she sank into a kind of a waitress in a bar-room down by the dock, where she drank ale with foreign sailors.

VI.

THE day before Christmas was a busy day for the whole town, and not least busy for the kind ladies who were distributing goods to the poor.

Miss Falbe was usually not so deeply interested at Christmas; for, odd and singular as she was in everything, she used to keep the little she had, until after Christmas. But yet today she was in a hurry from early morning.

She searched the town up and down, for she had made up her mind to find Elsie.

It was over a month since she had seen her; but today, when everybody was happy and enjoying themselves, she could not get poor Elsie out of her head; and she hunted high and low for her in all the crannies and hovels of the poor.

Late in the afternoon, when she had almost given it up, she suddenly met Elsie at a street corner.

Miss Falbe had often seen how quickly beauty, youth and grace fall from those who follow Loppen's path; but never before had she seen such a change.

But she was not the woman to be frightened off. With a tight grasp she seized Loppen by the arm, when she tried to run, and said quietly, as if nothing was the matter:

"Good evening, Elsie! It is nice that I met you. Won't you come and eat Christmas porridge with us this evening?"

Loppen looked up. For a moment there was a blaze of defiance and impudence in the big, bright eyes; but all at once she broke down, and walked a few steps sobbing, while she leaned on Miss Falbe.

Elsie wore a brown shawl, and had nothing upon her head. She had grown thin and pale in the face, and as she walked along, bowed and weeping, her neck was so rough and scrawny, that no one would have suspected that she had not yet completed her twentieth year. There was nothing left of her but her eyes, the big, bright eyes which were all the larger now that her face had lost its roundness.

She could make no response; she did not even try to do so, and Miss Falbe proceeded without waiting for an answer:

"I told Christian when I came out that I should bring you home with me if I met you. I shall go home at six; I am only going down to the mill to see a sick woman. Then we will drink our tea, and eat our porridge together. You can just as well sleep there, too; I will arrange the lounge for you in the sitting-room."

Elsie pressed her hand. They stood behind high stone steps where it was quite dark, and Miss Falbe took her about the waist.

"You must promise me sure that you will come, Elsie."

"Yes, miss, I will come," answered Elsie firmly, and looked up.

"Thank you; now you are a good girl," cried Miss Falbe joyfully, "now you must start over there. It is past five o'clock; I hear the bells ringing at the churches, so I will be there soon after you. Christian is at home; it is nice and warm there; tell him I will be there right away."

With that she hurried away. She was so happy that she almost ran.

But Loppen walked slowly toward the town, while she kept in the shadow as much as possible. To reach the Ark she had first to pass through the more aristocratic quarter, where the gaslights were more frequent, and where also the shops lit up what they could of an evening.

So she made a circuit through the park, and went right by the church. One of the side doors stood open; she had a strange longing, slipped in and sat down on a bench by one of the huge pillars.

At first she was half deafened by the loud clangor of the bells which were ringing in the tower. But when she had grown accustomed to the sound, it seemed as if she rested upon it and swung to and fro beneath the lofty arches.

There by the pulpit a couple of scrub-women were kneeling; they had a lamp on the floor which they moved about

with them, and up in the choir was a lantern which the men, who were repairing the heating apparatus, had set down.

Loppen had not been in the church for a long time, and it touched her wonderfully to see the holy place again in the uncertain twilight, and amid this festive clangor of the chiming bells.

Until an hour ago, she had not had a single thought but to get herself something to eat, or still better, something to drink; for she had been starving for several weeks, as they starve who eat a little bread or salt fish if opportunity offers, and otherwise keep life in themselves with ale and brandy.

Today she had tasted neither food nor drink, but that was all forgotten now; it had been forgotten, in fact, from the very first word Miss Falbe said.

That there was still granted one person who would talk to her like that!

A light had come into the night of degradation in which she had so long been roving about; thoughts of her better days, which she had dreaded and driven away with drink, came again without paining her. She could really sit there in the gloomy church and think of her little chamber at Madam Speckbom's. For Miss Falbe had smoothed away the worst of her shame; she felt as if she had been cleansed

from head to foot, and through it all she rejoiced on account of the porridge.

But the bells which had for a time been chiming softly, and as if far aloft, joined now in a great, strong peal which so filled the church that her ears rang with it. One of the scrub-women moved her light at the same moment, so that all the relieved heads on the pulpit stood out.

Elsie stared upon them and her eyes followed the dim light into all the corners of the church, up over the high arches where new heads gleamed out from among sculptured stone-flowers and leaf-tracery.

And at last the mighty tones of the bells seemed to her, to be streaming out from the pulpit thus lit up—quite as when she sat shivering by Madam Speckbom's side, while the priest thundered against sinners and shook the hard words about hell and judgment over her head. And now all those hard words had hidden themselves here and there among the stone flowers, and thrust their heads out to see if she was there.

A man arose from a trap door in the choir floor, took up the lantern and came toward her. Upon the white wall his shadow moved like a long, black demon who was coming to seize her. She watched him draw near; the anguish palsied her; she could not rise from her seat; she was bound tight;

she was locked in—she was locked into the church alone; and there he came—the light swung, the bells roared right in her ears; half crazed, she leaped up with a scream and ran; he was close at her heels! A thousand heads and fingers of scorn pointed after her! There she is, there—there, she threw herself against the door; it was open—she was out—she was saved, she thought; saved from the very claws of the evil one.

By common consent, it was genuine Christmas weather; starlit and clear at night, and just cold enough to be comfortable in furs.

Elsie hurried off to the Ark. There was a light up at Falbe's; but she had not yet overcome her fright at the church, and did not dare to go up just then.

Instead, she stole into Madam Speckbom's court-yard, where she was so much at home. A candle stood lighted upon the kitchen table. Loppen peeped in, but no one was there. She felt an uncontrollable longing to go in; it looked as if Madam and the servant girl were both out. She had long ago known how to lift the latch in a way of her own, so that it made no noise.

All was as of old; she recognized every article and odor in the kitchen. There stood a plate of bread and butter on the table. Loppen was prodigiously hungry, but she did

not touch it; she would soon get something to eat in an honorable way.

But so as not to be tempted, she cautiously opened the door to the drawing-room; no one was there, either.

The gas-light out on the corner stood just in front of one of the windows, so it was always light in the room in winter; and lying on the table Elsie saw three or four big bundles. Loppen was so familiar with customs of the household that she knew they were clothing and food which Madam Speckbom intended to distribute to the poor in her charge, Christmas eve.

While half from curiosity, half from absent-mindedness, she was feeling of each bundle, she happened to throw something down upon the floor.

She picked it up and examined it in the gas-light. Elsie recognized the soft, little thing; it was her own baby-hat—the little, brown hat with the rose-red band, which was made from the indestructible "Loppen" cloak.

She could not recall the time when she wore the hat; but many a time had she seen it in Madam Speckbom's drawer, and every time Madam had said that she should have it for her first baby.

Then she must be entirely given up now; her hat, the only thing she owned on earth, was to be given to some one else.

She pressed the hat to her face; but when she smelled the well-known perfume of Madam Speckbom's bureau, she burst into tears.

For a moment she stood in this way and cried over her baby-hat, while her spirits sank and sank, until she heard some one in the hall; then she thrust the hat into her pocket and stole out the way she had come.

It must be past six; Miss Falbe must surely be waiting. Loppen forced herself to go in at the street entrance and up the stairs. But at the Falbes' door she stopped and listened. Christian was walking up and down, as was his wont; through the keyhole she could only see his shadow, which came and went upon the wall. It was plain that Miss Falbe had not come home yet.

Loppen felt that it was impossible for her to go in while he was alone; she had rather wait without until Miss Falbe came.

But once she thought he was coming to the door; she flew in a fright a few steps up the attic stairs; and while she was standing there and listening, she heard from above tones which she had never heard before.

It was neither the drum nor the flute nor the piano; but long, moaning tones, tender and mysterious, as if they knew all her misery and had come to comfort her.

When she cautiously opened the door to Schirrmeister's

room, she saw the old musician standing erect before the lamp. He was playing the violin.

The light fell fair upon his little wrinkled face; but the humid, drunken eyes had a singular expression, and with an appropriate bow he saluted Elsie.

He had straightened his old back, and while his arm carried the bow with the precise elegance of former days, he bowed his little head, bald as a radish, listeningly over the violin.

It had been a year and a day since he had played the instrument of his youth. But this evening something so wonderful had come over him; he got his violin out and in some way mended the strings, and now he was playing his youth, his dreams, his puny triumphs, and his great overthrow.

He played a few chords and at last Spohr's "Adagio" which had gained for him the master's approval and he played without stumbling a single time—clearly and correctly as the master would have had it.

The starving note copyist and the drunken musician, he was no longer. With head thrown back, eyes wide open, he stood there in the light of the sooty oil-lamp and played the garret room into a vaulted salon with hundreds of lamps and rows of breathlessly attentive ladies and gentlemen. His wretchedness fell from him and the artist stood

forth once more; and the half-extinguished spark in his soul broke out into a noble flame as if music had forgiven him—music whom he had loved and betrayed; and at last came the great master, laid his hand upon his head and said: "He will go high in it."

With the instrument under his arm and with down-cast bow, Anton Schirrmeister bowed himself out into the room. Then he hastily laid the violin away in its case, closed the cover upon it, and threw himself into a chair with his hands over his eyes. But when a little later he looked up, Elsie was sitting just in front of him, on a chest by the door. She too, was holding her hands over her eyes.

And the old wreck looked at the young wreck and shook his head. Something was heard shuffling up the stairs and out into the garret as if a number of people were trying to walk softly. Puppelena peered in and then she stepped aside to make room for the others.

It was the whole "gang." She had collected them here and there. They were following her in the hope that she had something for them; so they were in a merry humor.

Loppen tried to steal away, but one of them took hold of her. It was Svend.

They had not seen each other for several weeks; and when they parted they were at outs. But in the mood Elsie

was in, she was touched to see him—even as ugly and disreputable as he was.

Svend noticed this and sat down beside her on the chest, to lament and whine and promise to do better and everything good if she would only stay with him again.

Elsie remained sitting and listening half abstractedly to the well-known voice and the well-known promises. But all at once there was a tumult over at the table; the tinker arose and swore and everybody looked at Puppelena more or less angrily—as he dared.

In short, it was so far from her having anything to banquet on, that on the contrary, she had hunted them up to get something to keep Christmas with—indeed, she had shared with them often enough.

She turned her big, heavy face around toward the men and said contemptuously:

"It's brave fellows you are! Not so much as a bottle of ale for blessed Christmas! Fie, for shame!"

They were non-plussed. The tinker muttered something about the hard times, Jorgen Tambur looked up at the ceiling, and even Olkonomen let his under lip hang idly; in so serious a situation he did not dare to mention the message he had just sent.

Only the man with the many faces retained his smile.

He sat close beside Puppelena and chewed raisins and nuts and threw the shells across the table.

Elsie knew him better now than when he frightened her with his grimaces. In many places, she had caught sight of him; he came and disappeared and no one seemed to notice him. But she knew that he had escaped from the prison at Akershus, and that he had staid out now for more than two years without the police being able to find him. They called him the mechanic because he was so expert at picking locks.

He now said to Puppelena, with a familiar nod:

"Yes, you are right there. People who have two strong arms, and eyes to see with, and yet can't get what they want on such a day—such folks I wouldn't give much for."

"What have you, then?" demanded the tinker.

"Oh, I don't usually carry much with me," answered the mechanic indifferently. "But at any rate, I am full; and now I am doing like the aristocrats—eating dessert after the meal."

With this he tossed a handful of raisins and nuts carelessly across the table. A young fellow who had lately joined "the gang," was gallant enough to pass a few to Loppen, who sat apart on the chest by the door.

The sweet taste excited her, hungry as she was. She

leaned forward to see if there were not more. But the others had taken them; there were, in fact, only two or three apiece; just enough so each would get the taste in his mouth.

The tinker muttered something about not everybody being versed in mechanics.

"There's no need of it, either," answered the other, while he deftly landed a bunch of raisins in Elsie's lap. "Where I came from, you could go in and out with a coffee-sack on your back."

All eyes turned now to the mechanic; and all were afire to know where that was. But they knew, too, that he was a dangerous man to be with and walked in dangerous paths, so no one dared be the first to open fire.

"Where was that?" was asked at once.

It was Loppen. She did not mean anything by it; it was only curiosity; the raisins were so sweet and it was so long since such things had been tendered to her.

The man of the many faces who had hitherto let his eyes run from one to the other, now addressed himself more to Elsie, while he now and then tossed a few raisins or nuts over to her, or across the table. They were seized in a trice by anxious hands; all had conceived a desire for more of the sweets which irritated without sating.

"Do you want to know where it is?" said the mechanic

gaily. "Well, that don't cost anything, my child. It is down in the corner just in front of Consul With's house at Ellingsen and Larsen's. The whole store is jammed full of people who buy like mad. That they do not eat themselves to death—the rich, on such a night, I can't understand. There is sugar and syrup and butter and rice—such a world of rice—and fine Danish butter and cheese—golden, fat cheese which glistens when you cut into it."

All leaned toward him and glared as if they would eat his words, and Loppen drew close to him. Her mouth watered at the corners and she thought she could smell that golden, fat cheese which glistened when they cut into it.

"And there are smoked sausages and hams and ale and wine—hundreds of bottles of sweet, strong wine; and there you can get as much of anything as you like if you only ——have the cash."

"Oh, the deuce!" exclaimed the tinker at the last words, and there was a general growl of dissatisfaction and displeasure; but the mechanic pretended not to notice anything and proceeded smiling and confidently, while his quick eyes glanced from one to the other and, as it were, fastened one word here and another there.

"But when you have no money, of course you don't go into the store; what business have you there? There is an-

other way which is much easier; it is but to push in, for there's not a person there. But they have been so kind as to put a light down there so you can see what you want."

"Where? Where?" was demanded impatiently. This time it was Svend whose dark gypsy eyes were aglow with excitement.

"You know the alley back of Madam Ellingsen's house; there is no gaslight except on the corner by the bank; at the bend is the door to the cellar beneath the store."

"Is it open?" asked the tinker.

"It certainly must be, for I only picked the lock a little and the door flew open of itself," responded the mechanic jestingly and made a few rapid gestures with his hands.

They stared at him with astonishment and Olkonomen whispered encouragingly to Jorgen Tambur:

"Then there can be no talk about burglary."

"But down there in the cellar, believe me, there's enough and to spare. There stand rows of sugar-loaves; hams and sausages hang there by the dozen; and sacks of coffee which can hardly be raised from the floor. But when you cut a hole in the sack and let some run out, then its only a fair load. And up in the store there's such a hubbub that they wouldn't hear if we yelled 'hurrah' down there; and the lamp stands on the top step of the cellar stairs because the boy now and then

comes down to get something. There's lots of wine too. I brought a sample with me; its too sweet for me—taste it!" He held the bottle out to Elsie.

She took a swallow, but he stopped her; they must each have a little taste of the sweet, strong liquor; but when the flask had gone around, Elsie emptied the last drop.

It rushed through her head like fire; the strong taste inflamed her appetite; she licked her lips and looked at the others and her raging hunger began to affect them. A feverish uneasiness came over them; the young fellow put his cap on to show that he was ready, and at last Svend said half to himself:

"If any one who is well acquainted, would show us the way ——"

The mechanic exchanged a hasty glance with Puppelena.

"If anything's to be done in good shape, there must be a number at it," he said half aloud and looked all the time at Elsie.

"We're with you," she cried eagerly and drew Svend forward.

"Yes—there's no parley about it; we're all along if the mechanic will take the lead," said the tinker then decisively, and arose.

The man of the many faces was now altogether another

man. With a few direct words he gave each man his instructions. Olkonomen, Jorgen Tambur and the young fellow were only to stand guard on the streets; the same, too, he wanted Elsie to do, but Puppelena thought that Elsie's shawl would be good to carry things under.

So it was decided that she should meet with the others at the turn farthest down the alley as soon as possible while business was yet lively up in the shop.

One by one they stole away by different roads; Svend and Elsie went together.

When they went past Miss Falbe's door, she pressed in between him and the wall. She had no pangs of conscience, only a burning dread of being checked. The air she had breathed among these people, the strong drink she had had a taste of, had with one blow awakened her wild defiance and transformed her into a greedy and voracious beast which amid foes and perils has to go out to steal. As noiselessly and quickly as a cat she drew Svend with her through the darkest shadows.

Old Schirrmeister sat alone once more in his imbecility and chewed away on an almond shell.

VII

"MERRY CHRISTMAS!"

"Thanks; the same to you!"

All the folks shouted to each other, smiled and bowed; no one could salute with his hat, loaded with bundles as they were.

Within the delicacy shops and toy-booths two or three rows of people were standing and leaned over each other, and the salesmen jumped about behind the counter almost like madmen.

Out on the streets it was just as crowded with children staring into the windows, although at the finest shops just where there was the most to see the window panes were so dewy from the heat inside that one had to peep in at the stripes after the drops which ran down, if he wanted to see anything.

There was a Santa Claus with snow-white beard who held a little Christmas tree on which tiny real candles were flaming. He was the most wonderful one could behold; but then there was a fastidious, half-grown girl who had been

inside herself; she said it was not real snow that was scattered over the man and glistened so prettily in the tree, but only white powdered sugar, for she had tasted it.

That spoiled the Santa Claus for most of them, and there was an abnormal rush to the next most remarkable thing, a carousel which turned around. And here the group of children became so compact that the grown people could hardly get their own loose; and yet they must hurry home. The bells were no longer ringing; it was past six; they must go home and dress and then only would come the pleasantest of all!

But could anything in the world be pleasanter than to walk about in the bright streets, among all the friendly people, who shouted "Merry Christmas!" For it was not only at the windows that there was something to see, but while you walked along there was a commotion, and it turned out to be a heavy man who had fallen, for it was so dreadfully slippery.

And all the bundles which were scattered around him! You would have thought that the man was a big toy-man to be shut up, full of bundles, which now poured out because he flew open when he fell.

"Lord! Poor fellow! Let me brush you off!"

"Did you hurt yourself?"

"Oh, a little," responded the fat man, and rubbed himself.

"It is dangerous to fall backwards," said one.

"Especially for heavy people," added another.

"You were lucky to get off so easily," said a third.

"All's well that ends well," said the first, who was the wittiest.

"Merry Christmas," said they all.

"Thanks; the same to you!" answered the fat man; and all helped him with the bundles, which were all presents; and the bundles were all in good condition except those which he had had in his rear pocket; but that no one could help.

"Now, we will go home," said the larger children, and took the little ones by the hand.

Of course they would go home. There was to be the nicest of all there; the Christmas tree, the presents, the surprises; but yet—this happiness must be long. It was so nice to have such a dreadfully good time and yet have the very best to come, so that one could hardly be very anxious to reach the best of all; for then it would soon be over.

But when they came home and were dressed and washed — with little water in honor of the day — a solemnity fell upon them. The fever of expectation which had been gathering through their wild dreams for weeks and months

was now at its height, had come up to the keyhole which glowed like a tiny star from all the candles which had just been lighted on the Christmas tree inside. Now there was only the door to be opened — the door to be opened — there was now nothing else which parted them from the great, the wonderful things, except this door — this door yet to open; some one was approaching from within — there was a rattle at the lock — it was moving — the door! The door was moving — it flew open — right up against the white wall they threw the door — Oh!

At Ellingsen & Larsen's store they were as busy as ever; those who came now were little folks for the most part, who made necessary and unnecessary purchases for Christmas. Now and then the heavy trap door in the floor back in the room opened, and the youngest of the shop boys ran down to get a new supply of one thing or another.

Loppen and the others had just come inside the cellar door when the trap door was opened; the others drew out in a hurry; but she remained standing stiff from fright.

But when she saw the boy's legs as he came down, she yet had self-possession enough to throw herself in among some sacks of flour.

While she lay there — silent, almost without breathing — she felt completely undone. Through her poor head ran in

cruel clearness her whole life from fall to fall, until she lay there — degraded to the lowest stage among thieves and robbers. Now she had to die, she felt that clearly; empty and thin as she was from starvation and days of sin the fright had palsied her; she fainted. The shop boy must certainly have seen or heard something there by the door; for he looked that way all the time. But as his courage gave out, he ran up again and shut the door.

The mechanic shook Elsie; she remained on the floor.

"I thought so," he muttered with a coarse oath. "What business had we with her?"

He stood a moment at a loss what to do; Svend and the tinker came in too. Suddenly the mechanic seized a flask on the shelf where he knew the liquors were, snapped the neck off with a dexterous blow, and poured a few drops into Elsie's mouth.

She awakened, disturbed, surprised; then she seized the bottle and drank again.

"There, now—take a heart-strengthener. You shall have two hams under your shawl for Puppelena;" with which the mechanic went to work, loading Svend and the tinker.

What was it she was drinking? She had never tasted anything like it before. It was sweet and strong like the other liquor; but it was roses—it was roses she was drink-

ing; roses which had followed her through youth, but which had until now been so far away. They had now come back to her once again—she drank them in long, fragrant draughts.

Like warm clothes it laid itself about her frozen limbs; all at once she became strong, her hunger was appeased, and stood up erect while a delightful, warm current streamed through her. A boundless joy welled up in her; she did not realize where she was; she thought of nothing; but there was not the faintest cloud upon the bliss she felt.

Whenever she drank it seemed as if she was sinking deeper and deeper into warm, fragrant rose-leaves, until they came together overhead, and swung her to and fro under lofty arches where roses sang and the music was fragrant with long, roseate tones which understood her misery and came to comfort her.

But the cellar-door was opened from without and Olkonomen hove in sight pale and breathless. The shop boy must have noticed something, for a message had gone for the police, and two officers were already at Madame Ellingsen's corner.

The mechanic was gone in a trice as if he had sunk in the earth. The tinker, too, ran off with what he had; Olkonomen went next, and there at the corner by the bank the long legs of Jorgen Tambur running away, were visible.

But Svend would not leave Elsie, who was standing with the empty bottle in her hand; he drew her with him toward the outlet through the alley which was yet free.

Suddenly she halted and pressed her hands tight against her bosom. Her eyes were brighter than ever; her lips were red with blood—she had cut herself on the neck of the bottle—and all her youthful beauty seemed for a moment to have returned to the little, delicate countenance; Svend stood utterly spell-bound; so beautiful she had never been.

Then she began to laugh, capriciously and merrily at first as when they were friends and all was well; then louder and louder until it was Loppen's old laughter; that which could run up stairs and down stairs and right into people's hearts; but constantly wilder and wilder she laughed until it went through him like a knife through the marrow of his bones.

Svend seized her to make her be quiet; but she then once more pressed her hands to her bosom, her face grew ashen, and with a long, quivering sigh she slid out of his arms and fell with her face in the snow.

Just then a policeman came running, and Svend took to his heels in the opposite direction.

* * * * * * *

"Merry Christmas," said the wife of the police chief.

"Thanks; the same to you!" answered Mrs. Bentzen.

They were standing under the big gaslight before Consul With's entrance. There was a broadening of the streets, almost like a small market, between the consul's house on the one side and Ellingsen & Larsen's on the other. And as that was the central point of the town's traffic, little by little several ladies gathered there, who had completed their purchases and their distributions. Mrs. With herself, who had just come home from the city, alit from her carriage and joined the group to exchange greetings and talk over the day.

There were not only ladies there from the Institution for Fallen Women of St. Peter's Parish, but from the various associations of the town; and the conversation was lively indeed; partly a little triumphant, occasionally too a trifle envious, when it came to defending or advancing their own institutions, as to how much they had had to distribute. But at bottom the tone was benevolent; each was done and had a good conscience.

"Yes, you are right; it is nice to be done," said one.

"It was such a busy day; I thought I should never be rid of my last bodice; everybody had a bodice; there were too many bodices this year."

"But then we know too that we have accomplished something," said Mrs. With on her side.

"Yes, there our pastor is right," exclaimed Mrs. Bentzen. "It is just the blessed thing about Christmas that one has done his duty, given to the poor. Today no one can complain, and it is so nice to think of it when we are enjoying ourselves."

"And it is not less pleasant to take with us to our homes the thanks and blessings of the poor," gently added the police chief's wife.

The chaplain looked with admiration at the handsome lady, and in the lofty Christmas spirit in which he found himself he would have liked at the close to address a few edifying words to the listening group of ladies, but just then Dr. Bentzen came across the street.

The old gentleman smiled with his ill-humored grin, while he said:

"Merry Christmas, ladies! Great robbery over at Ellingsen & Larsen's. The police have just caught a couple of them."

"Robbery! Steal! Oh, my God! Steal on Christmas Eve! Impossible! Who—who? does any one know them?"

"It can't be any one from our town," declared the ironing-board majestically.

"It is 'the gang' from Madam Speckbom's Ark," retorted the doctor spitefully.

"The gang!"— yes, "the gang" no one thought of; those abominable people were indeed a disgrace to the whole town.

It made a very disagreeable impression. The chaplain gave up his little speech and only sighed briefly over "the hardened sinners;" and then they parted to hasten home and to seek to recover from that blow upon Christmas festivity.

The police-chief's wife said to Mrs. Bentzen as they walked home together:

"See how distrait I am. When your husband said: 'Madam Speckbom's gang' I came within a hair of saying, 'You mean Miss Falbe's gang.'"

"There's something in that, too," responded Mrs. Bentzen and looked at the younger lady admiringly.

Miss Falbe really was running around through the town; she was hunting for Loppen. When she came home at half-past six, Christian had gone out; the whole house was empty and dark and Elsie nowhere to be found.

It was a bitter disappointment to Miss Falbe; she had been so happy in expectation of that evening, and it had never occurred to her to doubt that Elsie would come when she had promised so earnestly.

But then she happened to think that Elsie might possibly have been at the Ark at six o'clock but had gone away again

as there was no light. And then she inflicted upon herself severe reproaches that she had allowed herself to remain with the woman at the mill, and especially that she had let Elsie slip away from her when she once had her hands upon her.

The streets were becoming deserted. Before the windows stood only two or three pauper children freezing; the shops were closed, except the hucksters', which were still full of people.

As Consul With was going home, loaded down with bundles—he always had the costliest presents for his wife—he met three policemen who were carrying something long and dark between them.

"What is it, Hansen?" asked the consul.

"Oh, it's Loppen, consul."

"Hem! is—is she dead?"

"Only dead-drunk, I think. Merry Christmas, consul!"

"Thanks; the same to you!" answered Consul With and walked on.

As it grew quiet upon the streets, it grew livelier in the houses and the children's laughter and shouts stretched out into the cold winter night where Miss Falbe still wandered about, each moment fancying that she saw Loppen's shawl swing around the corner.

At last she met a policeman who also seemed to be looking for some one; he told her that "the gang" had been at burglary and Loppen had been with them

Weary and worn out Miss Falbe walked homeward. It was in fact not so seldom that she had undergone disappointments of this kind; but this was the most painful of all; she thought so much of Elsie.

When his sister did not come according to appointment at six o'clock, Christian had gone out; but he found no one to drink with that evening, cold and forsaken as it was everywhere; so he had gone home again, cross and crusty.

His sister said nothing but set the porridge over; it was ready, it was only to be warmed. While she set the table, he teased her with reproaches and spiteful witticisms; and when she came with the porridge, it was scorched because she had forgotten to stir it.

Everything was as unpleasant as well could be; and she had been so happy in expectation of this evening. For a moment she bore up bravely; but when her grief was victorious she laid her head upon her arm and sobbed aloud.

The brother sat a little while and looked at her. He had never seen his strong sister so broken down. He began to repent and tried to find something soothing to say.

"You see, now, Augusta! You will never meet anything

but disappointments and sorrow in the way you conduct yourself. If you absolutely must have these poor people to bother with, then do as the other ladies in town. Each has her own paupers to take care of; so they don't need to bother about the others. But you throw the little you have away on the lowest trash, who don't bear being helped—yes, perhaps you do more harm than good."

"No, Christian, I don't do that," cried Miss Falbe decidedly, and raised her head. "And I will not have paupers of my own. Let the others buy off their consciences with the trifles they dole out; let them go home secure in the belief that they have done their duty by narrowing their hearts to a few individual, deserving paupers where they can see the blessing—as it goes. I see that the great gulf will never be filled, however much there is thrown into it; and this certainty is the only reward you have a right to expect for your sympathy; it drives you from depth to depth, to the worst, the vilest, where you know fresh disappointments and fresh pains await you. For I know now what to think; money, gifts, alms, they all come in good. And I am glad when they come. But all the gold in the world does not fill so much of the gulf between those who have it easy and those who have it hard, as a single drop of warm human blood. And if you have not a clod to give them, but yet can bring

them to understand that you have that warm heart-blood, then you will not be afraid of disappointments, but will go from depth to depth and you will not need to look for your reward. So I shall get up early tomorrow morning and take hold where I let go."

When she had finished her brother went over to her.

Caresses were, to tell the truth, not frequent between the two; but he took her in his arms now and kissed her.

And he whispered something in her ear. She had heard it so many times, that promise which she knew he did not have the strength to keep.

But this time she believed him; she looked up to him with that wonderful smile which made her so handsome and thanked him.

Then they sat down again, laughed, cried and talked with each other as they had not done for many years.

The porridge was scorched, it could not be gainsaid; but how good it tasted nevertheless!

VII.

IT was a genuine Christmas Eve—still and clear. White, fleecy clouds swept like angels' wings past the bright stars and the moon which, risen late, gleamed upon the fresh snow and out across the dark blue fjord toward the sea.

Over the whole town floated a faint odor of roast goose and punch; and like distant psalms sounded the light snores of all who were sleeping near with overloaded stomachs.

The little folks slept soundly, tired out with good fortune, and dreamed of tin soldiers and candy toys.

The grown folks slept uneasily—tossed here and there, and thought a fat goose was sitting on their breasts and was rubbing lard under their noses.

But Loppen slept best of all.

* * * * * * *

"I think I might be left in peace Christmas Eve," said Dr. Bentzen, testily, as he came out of the prison. "It was only what I could have told you in advance, that

she would drink herself to death; and then any child could see that she was dead. Another time you can wait till morning, Hansen."

"Pardon, doctor! but I have orders to have the death certified without delay," answered the jailer, humbly, standing yet at the door. "Merry Christmas, doctor!"

The doctor snarled, and hurried through the empty streets to his warm bed. It was biting cold, a keen blast from the north came in from the sea.

Meanwhile the moon took possession, bit by bit, of the town and the country, scrutinized it all with her cold, indifferent eye, first on one side and then on the other; and when she had done, she laid a dark shadow over it and took hold upon the next.

In this way she came also to the prison, stole in aslant through a grated window, and there found Loppen on a cot by the wall.

Her gown stood open at the breast, because the doctor had listened for the beating of her heart, and one arm hung down toward the floor.

Her mouth was half open and the blood on her lips made it look black and large. She was ugly—hideously ugly—as she lay there withered and limp in the cold light of the moon.

She had lost her beauty and the rest with it. Beside it, she had not much to lose in life; and now when she went away, neither was she any loss to life. To be sure, there was somewhere a dish of scorched rice-porridge for her; but beyond that there was not a thing nor a place in life that belonged to her; so she could go away without disturbing anything.

It was very still in the big, cold, stone building. Only now and then, during the night, there was a slamming of doors, rattling of keys, steps and voices which lost themselves through the long halls, every time one of "the gang" was caught and brought in. For the chief of police had in a spasm of energy decided to seize the whole gang which had so long been a disgrace to the righteous town.

However, they did not get hold of those they most wished to have. The mechanic to whom the police had a clue, was and remained as if sunk in the earth. And Puppelena they could get no excuse to lock up; for at seven o'clock she was found already sleeping the sleep of the just in her bed.

When Svend was brought in, he asked about Elsie.

But when they told him, his gypsy blood flamed out in a wild struggle with the jailer and policeman; so they had to put irons on him.

After that, it was again very still in the big, cold, stone building, and the moon proceeded on her round. She had dwelt long upon Elsie, for there was much to see. It was fairly an epitome of a whole human life that lay there, a whole story—an old, old story, too.

There was nothing missing; it was all there. She had her shawl, her gown, her old shoes, and the rags she used for underclothing—yes, in her pocket she had her brown baby hat, too, with the rose-red band. Else she owned nothing; from her baby hat to her last rags they had faithfully followed her; what life had brought her from fall to fall, the current had washed together in one corner of the prison; yes, even to the roses—they were there too! The frost limned them on the glass back of the grating and they shivered upon her hand as if it froze them—or it might be from sympathy.

A couple of mice gnawed and piped beneath the cot; one ran across the floor and was gone. The clock in the church tower struck five; the sound shivered long in the glistening, cold morning air. But the moon slowly withdrew her light up the wall and out through the window; and, as she went, she spread a thick and soft mantle of darkness and oblivion over Elsie asleep.

And the moon went on, letting her cold, impassive eye

glide over the earth; and the night crept together into the shadows, ashamed of her evil secrets.

But at last the ponderous, frozen earth turned herself as if in pain away from the moon; and the sun began to shine upon the church-spires which were gilded to the honor of God.

And all the city's church-bells rang and chimed Christmas morning's festive jubilee out over the whole parish. And the children sprang up in their night-gowns to play with their new toys, or to eat something sweet which it had not been possible for them to find room for yesterday.

But all the grown folks dressed and went to church. So it was crowded and Pastor Martens had to drag himself into the pulpit. The winter sun sported gaily with the broken colors which it took from the pictures in the big choir-window; he shot slanting rays past the altar and sent tinted light, red, green, and burning gold down over the choir. There lay, as it were, a festal smile over the whole church—a beaming, blessed Christmas spirit.

It was on that, too, that Pastor Martens preached.

Christmas was not only a worldly holiday, a heart festival, a children's festival, but was besides—yes, first and foremost, a religious festival, where every joy,

every bliss has deeper base and root. And as he passed on to the text for the day, he dwelt strongly upon the gentle impressions from the Christmas of their childhood; and before the eyes of the parish he summoned the charming pictures of the babe in the manger, of shepherds and angels and offering kings, while the words fell from the pulpit mildly and tenderly, as if in childlike ecstasy.

If it were really so that a hard word or two from the thundering sermons about hell and the judgment had fastened themselves here or there behind the stone flowers, then were they thoroughly swept away to-day. All the pictures from the religion of pain and self-sacrifice were gently pushed aside, and He who hung and was torn to death with nails through his hands and feet—He became the most charming little babe, and Him—Him had they laid in a manger!

Tears came to kind Pastor Martens' eyes and his voice was mournful; there was something so ineffably touching in that. And thus it was that what in the world was lowly and despised—that, just that, was the true nobility, the true majesty; in that, too, there was something so edifying and consoling. So, then, no one had a right to complain of his station in life—indeed who would do

so when the lowest was the highest—when the lowly and despised were the elect? How blessed, oh how blessed, to know that! We have all only to turn with childlike minds to the babe yonder in the manger at Bethlehem.

Pastor Martens spoke with true inspiration. In his handsome voice quivered all the strained expectancy of collection day, and when he came to the benediction and prayer for the church, which he knew by heart, he scrutinized more closely the individuals among the congregation below.

He at once lit upon the rich old sailor, Randulf, Consul With's father-in-law, who was in the habit of walking at the head of the line of contributors. For here yet ruled "that gentle and Christ-pleasing custom"—as Martens called it—that the parish should personally present their offerings to the spiritual shepherd.

And Pastor Martens thought of the big, flat envelopes in which there could be nothing but bank-notes, but also of the modest packages of silver money; for he did not despise even the widow's mite, and even that vile copper had a blessed ring when it was deposited with humility on the table of the Lord.

It was one of the best sermons they had ever had from him; and Parson Martens occupied a recognized place

among the most prominent spiritual orators in the country.

The congregation felt so ineffably happy, so full of child-like joy, of Christmas joy. The police-chief's wife leaned forward and said to Mrs. Bentzen that far down in the church she could see a hat with Scotch trimmings which she had made herself and given away at Christmas —and it made her feel so good to see it.

Mrs. Bentzen nodded back with a smile:

"I feel as if we were all one great family."

Meanwhile the yellow winter sun kept up his sport with the colored rays. From St. Luke's ax he took a brown fleck and glued it on the bellman's face as he sat in gala dress back of the modest little table on which his offering was to be laid.

And farther down the church went the slanting sunbeams and here and there laid a halo of glory about this and that head down there.

But indeed there were no saints among them, and it was just as well.

All had their frailties, and all knew them.

Perhaps, indeed, there might be one or two who had a good many frailties; but Lord! who on such a day would find fault with his neighbor?

Each felt so sure of himself, so pleased with himself, so overwhelmingly tender and gentle as a child. They smiled to each other, and pressed close together, so all could get seats; it was pleasant to see the elegant, distinguished Consul With arise to give his place to old Madam Speckbom. It was really a lovely Christmas day, and the church was warmed, so they did not need their foot-bags.

And memory dwelt on the long line of festivals and merry gatherings, now standing without the door. They were just in the mood to take a long walk in the gay winter sun, and go home with good appetites to meet the fragrance of roast beef at the door.

And from the lofty, sunlit arches a holy Christmas feeling, pacifying like a good conscience, settled down upon the whole congregation.

But the church was filled with roaring tones. The organist played a festival prelude with broad, triumphant harmonies. And when the song began, it was sung boldly and joyously by the entire congregation; the most did not need once to look in the book, for it was the noble old Christmas song:

"At this, the blest old Christmas-tide,
We rightly look for pleasure."

FINIS